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Creating Community

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Return to Relevance

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A Good Start

A sampling of unequivocal positions recently taken by various bishops justify high hopes for continuing reform.

England's Cardinal John Heenan heads a move to persuade the Vatican to lift the blinds and enable priests and people to discuss openly, and make recommendations, concerning the agenda for the coming Synod of bishops in Rome. Austria's hierarchy offers one of the most candid reflections on "Humanae Vitae" with a strong assertion of the individual's rights of conscience. And Archbishop Hurley, of Durban, South Africa, hopes that hierarchies with similar views "will get together and make representation to the Holy Father. The dialogue must go on."

The same archbishop makes a humble and forthright acknowledgment of his growth to new convictions, urging that "bishops should not condemn new trends, but should be alert to values that are struggling to the surface." He thinks that papal "primacy must operate in accordance with the practices of communication and consultation accepted in modern, responsible society." Canada's bishop Alexander Carter asserts that the College of Cardinals is "obsolete for all practical purposes" and that the task of advising the Pope should be undertaken by the national bishops' conferences. He would reorganize Metropolitan Sees and elect the Pope through a permanent Synod of Bishops.

Cardinal Alfrink, with the support of the bishops of Holland, continues a courageous, frank, balanced approach to the problems of the postconciliar era. Celibacy, the local church, clergy-lay roles and relationships are discussed with utmost candor by responsible, recognized bodies. The Cardinal is equally sympathetic to the distress of those who move slowly and those who are impatient, and exercises wisdom and restraint in maintaining unity. High praise goes to Cardinal Lawrence Shehan for his efforts to introduce due process in the American Church.

Is pessimism justified when so many of our bishops exercise such farsighted, frank and courageous leadership?

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Creating Community

John Oliver Nelson

AN INTRODUCTORY GROUP DISCUSSION ON RECONCILIATION, LEADING TO SEVEN CONVERSATIONS ON ISSUES THAT ALIENATE MEN TODAY

"Seven settings for creating community" does mean settings (places where something is enacted), rather than just sittings (meetings to be sat through, doggedly). The conversations suggested in this book can become true settings in two ways: community may take shape among group members themselves, as they share great ideas and insights; community may also become newly possible in dozens of outside relationships, as members put their insights into action.

Conversation in a group does not just happen; it requires skill and patience. In most conversations, we experience limitations—business or gossip or sports—while in many situations, such as TV watching and listening, we receive rather than give. In many a two-person confrontation, by contrast, we only give, allowing the other person to talk unheard, while we mentally prepare our next speech. To converse in a group—without being bound by or imposing limitations—is an art worth cultivating and a great satisfaction.

Conversation is not a process that creates truth. If no one in a group knows the facts from which realistic opinions and de-

cisions can be derived, the results of conversation will have little or no value. To work honestly and creatively, a group must have at least one member (and far better, every member) equipped, informed and supplied with basic facts. In research terms, without factual input, we can expect no responsible output.

A familiar story illustrates this point. A village priest was to have his wine vat filled by his parishioners, each bringing a jugful. One cannily decided to bring just water, which would never be detected when the whole barrel was filled. The jugs were all poured in; a cupful was drawn to test the wine—and all that came out was water! Don't expect, in a conversation group, that everyone else will bring something, so that your empty-handedness will go unnoticed. All should come prepared with facts and with eagerness to share.

Yet in another sense, the conversation

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group as a setting for creating community *does* really create. Intimate community can prompt people to speak out as they might not in another setting. In a southern city where one form of racial intolerance was rigidly unmentionable, it was women in small guild circles who were courageous enough to speak out against it—and their testimony spread till it swept the city. Yet none of those who spoke in the small groups would have said a word in a group of a hundred: some new factor was inherent in small group conversation.

Conversation circles can also be exciting adventures in person-to-person discovery. The ready-talking member may discover that he or she is actually short on facts. The seemingly sleepy member may come up with the keenest observation of all—and at that moment, all lean forward to encourage and uphold. This is a truly Christian point, restoring community.

ACHIEVING WIDER PERSPECTIVES

One goal for these conversations is to achieve open-endedness, rather than to nail down the whole truth in each session. One reason some groups always want to close with prayer is that it opens out again, into Godly perspective, the partial viewpoints expressed or argued over during the session. More suggestions are given here than can profitably be used at most sessions; the idea is to disclose new vistas, start trends of thought and initiate explorations outside the scope of the group and the book.

So the conversations proposed here are not a series of speeches, not a collection of infallible answers. Rather, they are small forums in which changes in society can start. They are forays into human interrelations.

Each group member should have a copy of this book. Some may wish to add marginal notes and underlinings; others may prefer to get away as soon as possible from all prepared ideas—like the uninhibited church orator who could “take a text and go everywhere preaching the gospel.”

Each session begins with worship suggestions, goes on to bring up the questions and observations central to the issue and

ends with another brief period of worship. This is the overall structure—but any group will, and should, break out of the suggested pattern whenever the conversation takes a fresh, creative direction. (Remember to keep in mind the difference between a creative approach and a tangent!)

DETAILED PLANNING

Some other practical suggestions: *Convener*—someone should be appointed before each session to keep discussion on the track, recall the group from irrelevancies, call time on overly long speeches and close the conversation on time. This should be a different person for each session. *Resources*—all should be on the lookout for supplementary reading, slides, tapes or other means of enlarging the context. *Punctuality*—those sharing in conversation are likely to be busy people; so start on time and stop at an agreed cut-off hour, leaving time at the end for worship. *Set-up*—chairs in a circle, nonglare lighting, possibly a hearth (no blaze, only a glow and a flicker), an opening hymn or spiritual, minimal (if any) refreshments, paper with pencil for those who want to take notes. The simpler and quieter the setting is, the better.

Plan ahead. Choose Conveners in advance. Think ahead if any special preparation is needed: Conversation 5 involves inviting three teen-agers as guests; conversation 6 asks for some simple role play, which you might want to consider ahead of time.

Above all, there are two key requirements: 1) a willingness to be part of a “setting for creating community” and to work toward deepened awareness and experience of what Christian togetherness can mean, and 2) eagerness to learn the nature of New Testament reconciliation, with all its wondrous promise and perennial difficulty.

Convener: How wide, Lord is our circle of concern and love here? Is it one circumference around ourselves, quietly keeping others out? Is it a scope that takes in seriously only our family, those we explicitly call “loved ones”? Or is it a circle drawn around our neighborhood or town, our na-

tionalism, our race? Make us aware, O God, how wide should be the diameter of our own circle of reconciliation. Whom do we really care about, now?

Silence for a full minute

Convener: Why, Lord, do we usually fail as reconcilers? Are we lacking in chances to bring people together? Do we lack information about where tensions exist? Do we fail in bravery? Do we just not have what it takes, of conviction and compassion deep within us, to proffer affection and acceptance? Keep us conscious, O Father, where and why we fall short in the task of bringing people together.

Silence for a full minute

Convener: In this group, Lord, each of us asks for a particular gift of grace. May there be holding back by those prone to talk too much, and bringing out of the silent ones. May our conversations actually be worship: even when we talk on beyond the facts, may we be honoring and praising you.

Silence for a full minute

Convener: Turning from prayer, hear two great passages of the New Testament, which set our sights toward reconciling. 2 Corinthians 5:17-20: "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ *reconciled us to himself* and gave us *the ministry of reconciliation*; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, to be reconciled to God."

And 1 John 4:16-21 for a description of the quality of such reconciling: "So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment,

because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us. If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also."

Silence for a full minute

Convener: Those claims, O Master, are the reason we talk about reconciling and have some power to bring it about. While Jesus as the Christ is not the only witness to you and your will, while we uphold and explore other ways and other persons, we realize that our being changed—and having power to help others change—is all your doing. So our deep need and our adventure, both, are to rediscover who we are in relation to you and to Jesus as our Lord. Make us reconcilers, O God, in that process of being reclaimed by your love.

Silence for a full minute

Convener: Let us join in the Lord's Prayer (use: "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us . . .").

The primary purposes of this book and our conversations are of course that we "dare to reconcile" and that we achieve "seven settings for creating community" (not just talking about it). To start with, we hold up "alienation" and "being-at-one" to see what they mean for people who try to be Christian.

Because this first session will probably be the first time most participants have looked into the book, the procedure should be planned around that fact. Thus, in considering the four topics that follow, the group can either 1) read in 15 minutes the whole chapter and then take it up by sections, or 2) deal with the topics one by one, allowing 5 or 10 minutes for silent reading before each is discussed.

In either case, we are not seeking to

dispose of the subject decisively. Our goal is to lift up the chief aspects of each topic for attention. The time should be carefully apportioned among all four topics.

RICH AND VARIED MEANING

Defining. The word "reconciliation" has a colorful ancestry. The term "conciliate" (*con* = with, Latin; *cil* = go, Sanskrit, as in "sally forth") originally meant "get walking together." So conciliating is "Let's take a walk together," and re-conciling is the act by which people who were formerly at-one, but now are apart and split off, begin to stroll or march together again.

From another parentage, this same word links up (as reconciling still often does) with the idea of a council. It apparently had to do with bringing someone back into the council ring, re-conciling him or her into the fellowship around the fire, into the clan or tribe or family. Here, too, the idea is to restore a natural relationship, reclaiming something true.

Other meanings the word has acquired are familiar. In the courts or in the news, we reconcile stories of witnesses, by weeding out and interpreting the facts to show that two different accounts are actually describing the same event. At the bank or at income tax time, we reconcile columns of figures that are supposed to agree, checking to see just where one tally started marching off on its own. Or—commonly but mysteriously—lovers are reconciled after a quarrel.

Beyond these everyday meanings of reconciling acts looms the awesome and almost unbelievable claim: individual human beings can be enabled to walk together again with their Maker, can be restored to an original fellowship with God, which is their true role as persons. As the paragraph from 2 Corinthians indicated, anyone becomes a reconciler among people when he discovers this astonishing at-one relationship with God and tries to make it available to everybody around. "Agents of reconciliation" is another translation of "ministers of reconciliation"—as though we were agents representing the home office, the headquarters, the main place of business where the reconciling act is decisively available!

Looking in the other direction, what do we mean today by "alienation"? Many a sociologist, psychologist and theologian has claimed that alienation is the central experience of most modern human beings. What, then, is it?

We speak of alienating someone—pushing him away, making a stranger of him. We say that an idea is alien to us. A person is an alien (literally, "other") when he doesn't belong among us and is therefore regarded as hostile. Physicians who specialize in treating mental disease and hostility are designated alienists for this reason.

THE ALIENATED

The sense of alienation typical of the lonely crowd in this century is hardly so drastic. Alienation does mean aloneness, withdrawal, separation from others. People living in families may be actually alienated, whereas people who live alone may be actually at-one with others. The malaise is spiritual, not related to the physical proximity of other people. It means a life without real love, whether in the midst of a crowd or not. If we deal with reconciliation at all today, it is such alienated ones who are at the heart of the problems of society. Christianity claims that all of us are alienated, all unreconciled even with our neighbor, until we discover that we are at-one again with God.

Questioning. Does reconciling between persons demand that both sides must give in a bit, make concessions—or can one party come the whole way? Or can both be right? How do your answers apply in a relation with God?

Is the reconciler a bland half-and-half person who agrees with both sides, not moved by the fierce antagonisms he tries to mediate? Or does his work require more strength and insight than the combatants possess?

Similarly, does reconciling tend to say evil is not as bad as we think, or good as good, overlooking worst and best for some midpoint? Or does it see the deeper nature of both quarrelers better than they see it themselves?

Why do some people claim that aliena-

tion is more characteristic of people today than of any previous generation?

Some have claimed that alienation is just another term for self-pity. Could this be true? If so, does that fact alter the problem?

TYPES OF RECONCILERS

Defining. When in family life or school or business we find a personality splitting in two, or radically severed from everybody around, we immediately look for a reconciler. The child with tantrums, the far-out or dropout teen-ager, the housewife suffering from fantasies, the banker with ulcers or hypertension or blackouts—our reaction is to realize that they need professional help. Most often, they can become adjusted to the reality of their everyday existence, though they may find little hope of changing it.

Surveys have shown that when people themselves seek help in harrowing situations, about 70 percent of them turn first to a clergyman. This may be because he is available, readily identifiable, free, kindly and non-punishing. Or possibly it is because many people suspect, rightly or wrongly, that a religious adviser has a broad perspective, and ordinarily has no axe to grind.

On the other hand, when the schools, courts or other public agencies refer a troubled person for help, they send him to nonreligious counselors: psychologists, psychiatrists, psychometrists, social case workers. Many claim that our industrialized culture has produced these conflicts and must be technologically equipped to reconcile them. Possibly it should.

Certainly we turn to government, more and more, for nonpersonal kinds of reconciling. Whereas the state was once called upon only in legal actions, to keep peace and bring justice, now it is brought forward for a far larger share of the costly mediating that our society demands. Thus government is asked to reconcile labor-management disputes, quarrels between rich and poor, racial strife, prices, mental disorientation (in state hospitals), even the clashing claims of religious groups about birth

control or Bingo or Sunday closing. When conflict cries for adjustment anywhere, it seems, the common response is "There ought to be a law!" So whether we call this socialism or not, we do ask the state to do much reconciling of interests—and people—when conflict comes. Reconciling, from this viewpoint, is seen to be the job of psychology and the public agencies, not of well-meaning Christians.

ELEMENTS IN RECONCILIATION

Questioning. What does the professional counselor possess that enables him or her to reconcile: Long or summarized experience? Sharpened sympathy? Power to imprison, commit to hospital or prescribe drugs? Technical skill acquired in training? Impersonality and level-headedness? What other qualities?

Do courts and laws actually achieve reconciliation? What becomes of warring interests and violent emotions once a legal decision has been made? Are they overruled and healed? Is one side labeled victor and the other vanquished? Does the loser customarily come to recognize that he was wrong? Or is he likely to take out frustration and defeat in some other way?

If all the right laws were enacted and enforced, what would still be lacking as human interests continue to clash?

How do reconciliation, mercy and justice relate to each other?

Defining. It is human experience that people who have been forgiven sometimes find in themselves a new capacity to forgive. (At other times the forgiven one so resents the mercy extended to him that he hates all the more.) The New Testament, especially, claims poignantly that when the wrongdoer realizes the full meaning of his forgiveness (grace, not justice), he is renewed as a person. In the story of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:21-35) our Lord indicates that it is unnatural and almost unbelievable for the forgiven one not to become, in turn, the forgiver.

Consider, too, the claim of the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21: We all have a new responsibility and ability to reconcile,

as soon as we discover that God has offered us through Christ a reconciliation of cosmic dimensions. One synopsis of this New Testament account is a three-sentence "plan of salvation," which reads like this:

God created man in community with him.

Man broke community.

God restored community, through Christ.

CHRISTIAN SENSE OF COMMUNITY

It is the Christian experience of restored community with God that empowers those who experience it to extend this community among others. Many an outsider to the Christian faith thinks that believers "go about doing good" in order to earn the reward of heaven later. The actual process is exactly the opposite: heaven comes first, the actions afterwards! For the Christian experience is finding ourselves at-one with God—the original meaning of atonement, or making at-one—and then handing this realization on to anyone we meet. So it is the essential business of the Christian fellowship to reconcile, *because* we have found ourselves reconciled with God through the Christ.

Many dedicated secular workers would disagree. They would say that their relationships with people have no need of a relationship with God, which Christians proclaim as the source of their motivation. In the secular view, there are plenty of other reasons to say, "be reconciled"; we need not demand reconciliation "*because* God has reconciled us to himself." Indeed, only the Christian tradition, among many others, sees the work of reconciliation as the work and intention of the God of the universe, carried out by human beings. Yet those who offer reconciliation in the Christian tradition do so, not with the boast that they have thought up a superior interpretation of reality, but with the humility of having *experienced* the work of God in Christ, through Christian community and through personal response to God.

Even if this overarching reason for reconciling were not true, reconciliation would be a must, age after age, in the human

community. It is the distinctive, and often painful, imperative of the gospel that we are to reconcile because God has shown us reconciling as his own will and way.

QUESTIONS FOR CHRISTIANS

Questioning. Do most church members actually have any inkling of what it means, how it feels, to be reconciled with God now?

Further, do they acknowledge any mandate that they themselves be reconcilers? Why is the St. Francis prayer, beginning "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace . . ." one of the most common wall plaque quotations, when so few people dream of making it their own program?

What has taking the Christian approach come to mean in a conflict situation? Does it mean that we love everybody, or overlook the real wrong, or take on others' troubles as our own, or quote Scripture—or what? In one religious television series, the climax of the 27-minute plot used to be the appearance of an earnest figure who earnestly quoted a Bible verse—whereupon all suddenly began to shape up and end happily. Is there any such reconciling word, usually?

Granted that Christians are agents of reconciliation, should they often name the Name in their work of healing human relations? Could doing so enable others to draw from the Word of God for themselves—or would it alienate most people?

What reaction should be expected when any Christian effort is made to mediate a conflict: "Who do you think *you* are?" or, "About time *somebody* did something!" or, "What's all this Christian stuff?" or what?

Defining. The evident and often embarrassing question is: How does anybody "get converted" in this generation? Attempts to answer bring up complicated issues.

First, do people *need* a deep realization of God in their lives? Are they alienated in the universe, or just among their fellow citizens? The vast majority will declare that they are "doing all right, thank you." They work, pay their bills, attend church, avoid fights, celebrate, claim their

Medicare payments, die with a funeral insured. Alienated? Not me!

Yet surveys testify that most of us do experience real alienation and even loneliness. No problem comes more often, says a student adviser, than the plaint, "Why am I incapable of real love and caring? Others love me but I can't return their love."

The same inability appears in the often-repeated story of the orphanage child who had been writing notes and hiding them. When one was discovered, it was found to read, "Whoever finds this, I love you." The poignant item here is not that she felt unloved, but that she could love no one she knew—only some stranger. This is a characteristic modern reaction, a current token of our form of alienation.

THE ARMY OF THE UNRECONCILED

Other signs that millions of us are drastically unreconciled are abundant: unsatisfied absorption with sex, mounting statistics of alcoholism, heartlessness without heroism in our war making, riots and delinquency and racism in city and country, teen-age cynicism, the unfulfilled hungers sung out in popular songs. In traditional Christian terms, these are all evidences of "the need for conversion," whether we accept that description or not today.

Assuredly, most people will never "look to God in prayer." Rather, modern man seems to look not for the gracious God but for the gracious neighbor. Even if the process of reconciling is theologically grounded in reconciliation by God, as a practical matter it must start at the other end for most of us. For only when a man finds the gracious neighbor (for many a rare find indeed!) has he a clue that there may be a far greater dimension of graciousness, in God. So the radiance and empathy of persons is the prime necessity in any effort to convert—and even this will often be rejected and ridiculed when it is sincerely offered.

The other side of the effort to "win" persons to an at-one relation with God is to look beyond any graciousness we may represent or offer, pointing others to some direct acquaintance with God as he is. For

all of us have seen instances in which someone has failed completely to recognize the gracious neighbor just because he had no evidence of graciousness anywhere in the universe. A bitter criminal, surrounded by family and case workers and pastor and all the graciousness man can muster, is likely to perceive graciousness nowhere—unless he knows it as a gift of God.

REALIZING GOD'S PRESENCE

Can we confront modern man with drama and art forms so vividly witnessing to the presence of God that God speaks directly through them? Worship experiences, whether traditional or newly creative, may yet strike through our sophistication and boredom. The ceremonial campfire for the youth group, the intense and waiting silence in the midst of public worship, the tourist liturgy at one of the vast-vista national parks, the biting but cosmic ballad at a coffeehouse, the Eucharist served in simplicity around an intimate table—there are fresh ways yet open to us for enabling God to be recognized by people who have never known him.

Verse 19 of the passage in our opening meditation period reads in the King James Version, "We love him because he first loved us." So stated, it seems like a fair exchange. But in the Revised Standard Version it reads, "We love, because he first loved us." In other words, we have the capacity to love at all, the ability to emerge from our alienation into reconciled fellowship with anyone, anywhere, just because we have had some wisp of experience of being loved by God.

Accordingly, we try to offer as widely as we can both the gracious neighborliness that will commend the gospel, and as direct an experience of God himself as Christian worship in its endless forms can provide. If we take seriously the assumption that a great many people around us do live in alienation from God and man, and if we quietly accept the role of agents of reconciliation, then our casual remarks, our choice of conversation topics, our invitations, all may become deft efforts to speak to that alienation. We may persuade people

to stop their vendetta against God, to call off hostilities against him and one another, to "say yes to the light." Or possibly our reconciling work—which is not easy and which takes all the imagination and loyalty we have—begins even with our first step, being sure that God exists and seeks to be at-one with each person whom he brings into life here.

Questioning. Where do we see Christian conversion taking place. At evangelistic meetings? In the Peace Corps and similar kinds of work? In college religion courses? In church school or confirmation classes? At baptism, communion and other sacred moments?

Where do we most fall down as reconcilers: In knowing too little theology for even conversation about it? In having too little peace and radiance to impress anybody?

Is everyone who calls himself Christian intended to be a reconciler, or is this just one gift of the Spirit among a lot of others?

Can you point to some situation in which New Testament claims divided people rather than bringing them together?

Do we know others in our community or neighborhood for whom these settings for creating community could provide reconciliation with God and other people? Could we bring them to this circle?

A prayer by everyone: O living God, renewing, reaching out to gather all your creation into one, we offer you great thanks and loyalty this day. May we experience enough of your offered grace to be able to carry some measure of it to those around us, with the strength we find in Christ.

Group responses (Half the circle taking the verse, half the response):

V—For these exchanges of truth, and our share in them, we give God praise!

R—For new concern about people, that they open up into new awareness of their Maker and their neighbors, we dedicate our own selves.

V—That we may share the pain and desperation of persons caught in forces beyond their choosing, here and abroad, we ask for intelligence and the power to identify.

R—Our thanks are given to God, who calls us, equips us and disciplines us, offering us joy in reconciling, in Christ. *Amen.*

DANGER!

During the long interim period which we are now entering, a new provisional way of handling dogma, doctrine and discipline must be worked out. If this is not done, the misunderstandings of the Reformation period will be re-enacted once more and thinking men forced out of the church.

Thomas F. O'Dea

The Church Returns to Relevance

Thomas F. O'Dea

THE CHURCH IS ON TRIAL BEFORE THE WORLD TO BE RELEVANT WHILE REMAINING ITSELF

The ecumenical council of our era, known now as Vatican II, the call to which was announced by Pope John XXIII in January 1959, was opened by that pontiff on October 11, 1962, after over two years of preparation. In that period many feared that the Roman Curia would so emasculate the coming council that little would be accomplished. In his opening speech John himself repudiated those "prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster," who think "that our era, in comparison with past eras, is getting worse," and who "behave as though they had learned nothing from history, which is none the less, the teacher of life." John saw, rather, in "the present order of things" Divine Providence "leading us to a new order of human relations, which, by men's own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward the fulfillment of God's superior and inscrutable designs." He affirmed as well that "everything" in our day "leads to the greater good of the Church." He proclaimed that

. . . the Catholic Church, raising the torch of religious truth by means of

this Ecumenical Council, desires to show herself to be the loving mother of all, benign, patient, full of mercy and goodness toward the brethren who are separated from her. To mankind, oppressed by so many difficulties, the Church says, as Peter said to the poor who begged alms from him: "I have neither gold nor silver but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise and walk."

Until December 8, 1965, when the Council was closed by Paul VI, there took place some 10 public sessions in which were enacted 16 conciliar documents dealing with a great variety of issues. In his formal

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closing brief, Pope Paul stated that this Council "must be numbered without doubt among the greatest events of the Church." It was the largest ever held, as Paul noted, and "the richest because of the questions" which it "discussed carefully and profoundly." It was, moreover, the "most opportune, because, bearing in mind the necessities of the present day, above all it sought to meet the pastoral needs and, nourishing the flame of charity, it has made a great effort to reach not only the Christians still separated from communion with the Holy See, but also the whole human family."

COMPROMISE IN RESOLVING ISSUES

Our consideration of three major Council documents has shown that the Council did face the issues before the Church, did attempt to formulate direction with respect to them, and found it necessary in doing so to compromise newer perspectives and newer understanding with older ideas and mental postures characteristic of the Church for a long time. The documents of the Council show the results of compromise. They exhibit the stresses and strains which were experienced in the effort to inaugurate a profound updating of Catholic Christianity.

The inner content of conciliar documents indeed offers to content analysis a much more reliable index of the kinds of conflicts and the nature of the dangers to be faced in the postconciliar epoch than does the actual voting record of the assembled Fathers. The final voting on Council documents recorded a near unanimity. On December 4, 1963, the Fathers enacted the decree on Communications (*Inter Mirifica*) by a vote of 1,960 to 164; on October 28, 1965, they enacted the *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* by a vote of 2,221 to 88. On an earlier vote on the proposition concerning the Jews there were 1,821 affirmative as against 245 negative votes. The vote on the declaration on Religious Liberty in December 1965 was 2,308 to 70, and the vote for the *Gaudium et Spes*, to which we devoted major consideration in this analysis on the same day was 2,309 to 75. The *De*

Revelatione, despite the earlier division of 1,368 to 822, finally was approved in November 1965 by a vote of 2,344 to 6. Obviously the conciliar vote tally fails to represent the distances separating viewpoints in the Church and fails to register the various groupings among the episcopacy and their advisers.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF HISTORICAL CATHOLICISM

It appears that every issue of significance in Christian history, and indeed in religious life, came before the Council. What is man's ultimate destiny? What is his earthly vocation? How are they related to each other? What is man's relationship to God? What is human community? How are the two interrelated? What is meant by saying that God speaks to man? What is the Christian Church? What is the relationship of God's call to man's earthly drama? What is the relation of the Church to the world? What is religious participation, and how is it related to man's quest for ultimate meaning and relationship? These questions or their equivalents arise in every culture and find their answer—implicitly or in explicit beliefs—in every religion. Historically, Catholicism has spelled out a complex of answers, embodied them in its creeds and liturgies, and built around them its communal and hierarchical structure. This set of themes, institutionalized within the Church, provided the basic answers to western man's problem of meaning for centuries. The answers were guaranteed and underwritten by the sense of the immediacy and reality of God and of man's relationship to him and participation with him in the Church which long characterized Catholic faith and remains its greatest source of strength.

This institutionalized form of Christianity became the tutor of Europe and provided European civilization with its basic consensus. But the forms of intellectual expression, of liturgical participation, and of organized membership that came into existence hardened little by little and became alienated to one degree or another from important elements in the dynamic society

of the high and late Middle Ages. We have seen how the Church, once mother and schoolmistress of Europe, gradually became a stranger and an alien in the midst of the civilization her children brought into being.

First came the Reformation, which attempted to renew and purify Christianity outside the unity of the old Church and in contradiction to many of its doctrines. At the same time there took place the rise of humanism, rooted in the Hellenic culture which the early Church had embraced and brought into synthesis with its own religious world view. In the Renaissance men sought a more this-worldly religion, and in the Enlightenment they revolted in the name of reason against the religious institutions of the past, seeing them as the fabrications of priestcraft and superstition.

DYNAMIC RIVAL SECULAR GOSPELS

Marxism presented western man with a new and dynamic counter gospel invoking history and science and interpreting in a this-worldly manner the memories of Christian transcendence which Hegel has historicized. In the 17th century Europe saw the rise of modern science, and since then western man has experienced its demythologizing effects upon the modes of his most intimate thought. Protestantism, humanism, Marxism, and scientism—against all these the Roman Church attempted to maintain and defend the forms of Christianity it had evolved in the first thousand years of Christian history.

In the meantime lay elites and finally many of the common people seceded from the Church and its ecclesiastical and clerical culture and constructed a dynamic western civilization. Never before had man achieved so much control over the means and circumstances of life. Technology introduced a laicized society in which traditionalism was dissolved. Urbanization created a wholly new kind of culture. The intellectual effects of science and the sociological consequences of the technology made possible by science destroyed the old world of rural peculiarity and cultural isolation. All this came to a head in the 20th century in this

communications revolution, which continues swiftly to uproot men from older cultural settings. There was a secularization of culture, a vast and deep inner transformation of the modality of western experience marked by a loss not simply of traditional guidelines and anchorage points but of the religious motivation and substance of large numbers of people, both mass and elite. Furthermore, this dynamic, antitraditional, technologically based urban world is torn by conflicts—old conflicts inherited from the past and new ones brought to realization in the difficult conditions of the transition.

Robert Merton has suggested that in our times a new differentiating criterion exists which is more significant than the older structural differences that distinguished groups of men in the past. More important than social class, or religious affiliation, or even national and ethnic allegiance is whether one is rooted in particular provincial cultural settings or is part of the larger translocal world brought about by science, technology, social mobility, and the communications revolution. To Merton the distinction between “locals” and “cosmopolitans” is perhaps the most strategic one of our day.

THE COMMUNICATIONS REVOLUTION

In a study of the Middle East a decade ago, Daniel Lerner found that people could be divided into three types depending upon how much they were a part of a provincial setting or how much a part of the larger world of modernity. His categories were “traditionals,” “transitionals,” and “moderns.” In that transitional and conflict-ridden part of the world, he says, it was “transitionals,” the men “in motion,” upon whom the destiny of the region would ultimately depend. They had altered their mode of consciousness; they had developed a “psychic mobility” which made them pursue goals and aspirations far transcending the ideas of rural provinciality.

Both Merton's and Lerner's classifications point to the communications revolution as the most significant agent in modern societies. The world of the moderns, the

transitionals, the cosmopolitans is the world of tomorrow, and it is this world which the Church tried to take into account, with which it tried to enter into genuine and authentic relation in the *Gaudium et Spes*. It is a world compounded of the elements against which the Church has always acted in a defensive manner. Yet it was this modern world which also looked to Vatican II with hope.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND EFFECTS OF MODERNITY

Protestantism had tried to reform and renew Christianity and later to render it relevant to modernity. Its achievements were impressive, but it was not successful on the whole. Humanism, Marxism, and scientism had proposed substitutes for Christianity, but, in the form in which they have come down to us from the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, these are as obsolete and outmoded as the traditional forms of Christianity. A this-worldly humanism or a historic apotheosis which consists in a collective control of the conditions of life is a necessary ingredient of any viable system of values western man may evolve, but they are insufficient. Men are beginning to look beyond the simple, limited, and provincial this-sidedness of the Enlightenment and of its child and heir Marxism. They raise again the deeper problems of meaning and the questions of ultimacy and transcendence. The development of modernity which has enhanced man's powers has also removed his securities. It has brought him face to face with the challenge of understanding himself and his situation, no longer as the adolescent rebel of the Enlightenment, but with a mature responsibility capable of responding adequately to the problems of human survival in the third quarter of the 20th century.

What do the perennial religious questions mean in this setting? What does the Christian answer mean in this new situation? In the face of the greater anomie which has been the obverse side of emancipation many attempt to withdraw into older securities, no longer securely believed—Christian securities, humanist securities,

Marxist securities, scientific securities. But such halfway houses cannot last out the contemporary crisis.

We have seen in the documents of the Vatican Council the intellectual and existential problems in the encounter of the Christian tradition with a rapidly unfolding modernity. History and ontology, process and substance, immanence and transcendence, openness and structure; self-expression and realization and discipline and directed development for individuals—these indicate sides of reality which western man must confront and relate together. As a consequence he can evolve a view of himself and his world that will do justice to his situation as his enlarged consciousness can now grasp it. Western man has brought himself to that point where he must self-consciously opt for self-consciousness and its inherent responsibilities or vanish before the Pandora's box of technical achievement and detraditionalized human aspiration which his efforts have opened up. He faces the challenge of genuinely coming of age.

NEED OF GENUINE COMMUNITY

The development of human personalities—of stable personal organization for individual human beings—that can achieve maturity requires some enduring context of beliefs, values, and social structures. It requires the building of genuine community. But the communications revolution, the growing affluence, and the inherent dynamic involved in science-based technology threaten to make community in the old sense—stability in the old sense—impossible. Man's expanding knowledge makes specific and fundamentalist traditional lore obsolete and thereby undermines one of the cornerstones of traditional stability. Can modern men learn to build community on the basis of this dynamism? Can they evolve a religious consciousness which will provide the orientation and guidance in relation to the total human situation necessary for this great task?

We stated earlier that in its effort to update itself, to achieve an *aggiornamento* in depth, Catholicism stands surrogate for

Christianity as a whole, and upon the success or failure of this effort depends the future of Christianity. We may suggest too that the success or failure of Christianity in this crisis may well prove the strategic element in determining whether western civilization will continue its remarkable career of developing man's potential or whether it and many of its most precious human values will vanish from the scene, to be rediscovered by what suffering and at what time no one knows.

RELEVANCE AND NEW RESPONSIBILITY

The Catholic Church has returned to relevance. What happens within its confines from now on will be the concern of all. In returning to relevance from its long, defensive withdrawal, it has taken on a new responsibility. Can the Church maintain its unity and bring about its sociological demythologization? Can it shed the forms evolved historically and find new modes of thought, expression, and participation relevant to the new age which is advancing upon us? Can it bring into the future the spiritual wealth of its ancient tradition? Can it achieve all this and maintain its faith—its deep conviction of God's immediacy and reality, and its sense of the meeting of immanence and transcendence in Christ? Can it find *aggiornamento* in depth without loss of depth and intensity of its faith? Can it do so and evolve the new form of organization and presence—neither "church" nor "sect"—requisite to its mission in tomorrow's world?

It is at any rate on trial before the world to bend its every energy in the attempt. It must make the attempt by aiding man's advance to maturity. While it preserves and guards what used to be called the simple faith of the people, it must recognize, prepare for, and contribute to the new world of the communications revolution and mass higher education which technology will bring into being, a world in which "simple faith" will be transformed beyond our every expectation.

Max Scheler wrote a half century ago,

"Consider the person who wishes merely to *preserve*, or at the most *defend*, his religious position: if he dare not see in it the positive means of salvation for suffering humanity, and will not extend to humanity this means in a gift of joy and love, then he will find even his more modest goal of self-preservation *no longer* attainable. As men reckon, his cause will vanish from the face of the earth. For this is how things stand: neither mass-indifference, however widespread, nor even heresy and unbelief, nor sham piety nor superstition were ever a real, an ultimate danger to the existence of a positive religion and Church. Rather the opposite—the outworn, the decadent, custom and inertia were never so mightily propped and preserved in Church-religion as by—*inter alia*—indifference and unbelief. Especially among the educated. Only one true possible danger threatens the existence of a positive religion—the greater enthusiasm and the deeper faith of those who practice *another religion*. It was skeptic indifference and unbelief which enabled the Churches to live such an easy life before the war and to be so content with "maintaining" their position.

NECESSITY OF GIVING

"But the time will come when unbelief's sterile negation and the apparent tolerance of religion by lazy indifference will come to an end. Then religion will once again be recognized and attacked from all sides for what it is—the highest concern of man. Then will be an end of the easy life. And with it there will cease the perfunctory frontier-patrol of one's values and ideas, or the airtight, quasi-paralyzed self-mummification in the coffin of exclusive organizations and places apart.

"Only one alternative will then be valid—either one must gird up one's loins and with open, succoring arms, *give*, present or lavish something on humanity, heal its heart's open wound, or one must be prepared to find that the world, though thirsting feverishly for religion, believes one has nothing to give; to find, even, that one no longer feels oneself wholly in the right or in

possession of the true and the good—of, in short, the divine verities. But in the latter case one must also be prepared to find that this catalytic conviction also penetrates one's own ranks, and that the mere policy of "holding fast"—that gesture of pride and avarice—brings on the destruction of the very things which one wished to preserve. Any positive religion which today fails in the above sense to carry out its spiritual mission, to bear new and living witness to its cause in every way, is most certainly doomed to defeat and decline in the spiritual struggles which we have before us. Not in the sense of outward power and might,

but in the sense of proofs of heart and soul, every positive religion must win victory or suffer defeat. He who has nothing to give in *this* crisis of the world will lose what he possesses."

The hour of Scheler's challenge has indeed arrived. Christianity is becoming a serious thing again; Christians and especially the Christian leadership must be serious about it. Is it "now only the dawn," as Pope John declared, "a forerunner of most splendid light?" Will there, in response to intelligent and responsible human effort, be given a new outpouring of the spirit?

■ ■ ■

AMERICAN OPPORTUNITY

Catholicism in America has the opportunity to carry forward the renewal started at Vatican II into a religious renewal of great significance to the crisis of Western man. It can do this only by encouraging its liberal forces and working together with its ecumenical brethren for a Christianity no longer obscurantist, no longer reactionary, no longer clutching its definitions. It has the opportunity to help men discover the good news of its message, but in order to do so it must seek to cleanse itself of the dross accumulated in its unfortunate historical encounter with modernity. It must now reconcile itself to modernity, but not at all by capitulating to secularist vanities and superficial fads. The times are indeed serious; they call for judgment, for patience, for critical intelligence. Too frequently both the conservatives and the liberals lose sight of this.

Thomas F. O'Dea

Books Received

Why Be a Christian
Rosemary Haughton
Lippincott. \$3.95

A young priest, at present engaged in preaching parochial missions and conducting retreats, told me that he carries this little volume about with him wherever he goes. He found it of immense assistance in proclaiming the core of the good news, in an understandable and attractive idiom, to congregations and groups trying to be Christian today.

This is scarcely surprising. Mrs. Haughton is a convert, wife, and mother of a large family. Highly articulate, she's been assimilating the best in the theological renewal and relating it to her own experience and that of her family and neighbors. She is at home with the new theologians, and her way with words enables her to communicate with people who have neither the time nor capacity for erudite books.

In this small book of 140 pages, comprising 10 chapters, she points to reasons for being a more committed Christian, a more hopeful Christian, and (for those "outside") a more sympathetic observer of Christianity. Familiar with the sources, she conveys something of the joyful enthusiasm of the first Christians and the fundamental lessons they teach Christ's followers in our day. A Christian "personalist", she indicates the significant difference between half-hearted sharing and sharing generously, "living and partly living," law and life, and the experience of Israel with its God.

This prepares for chapters on the gradual interior and exterior growth of the Christian community, the preaching that satisfies a need for real "living" and not merely a system authoritatively imposed. As the book unfolds, matters like transformation, tradition, the Church and the future, glorification — all receive clarification, and encourage the reader to strive for the fullness of Paul's claim "Christ lives in me."

Patterns of Promise
Ed. The Christian Brothers
Holt, Rinehart and Winston. \$3.60

This book and its hopeful point of view deals with "Christian Doctrine: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow." Edited and published by the Christian Brothers, at Winona, Minnesota, it benefits by the work of a team of able contributors. I should think it will be of great benefit to upper grades in high school, colleges and to interested adults. Its vantage point is our contemporary world with its continuous change and challenge to the Christian. It tries to meet the situation of the unreligious Catholic, those who avoid religious change, and those who seek earnestly for renewal and reform.

"A theology of hope," it contends, "is a theology that looks forward to the possibilities of the future. The Christian who hopes may feel profoundly the evil of today. Yet in Christ and in the promise of Christ's resurrection, he can see the world with a new kind of realism. Listening for what is really happening among men, listening also to the word of God, he struggles with the problems of today and probes the reality of today to find the patterns of promise for tomorrow. His hope is for risen human life."

With this as the key to its presentation, it develops the theme of hope in three main sections: 1, The Story of the Future; 2, The People of the Promise; 3, The Struggle for Understanding.

Seven chapters endeavor to see man honestly in his contemporary situation and the hope which is the heart of Christ's revelation. Doctrine is then presented according to certain tests as guidelines: belief in God as revealed by Christ; contemporary social problems; openness toward change; the values in realms other than the strictly religious; legitimate pluralism in the Church; and Christ's work of reconciling all men by and in the Spirit.

Spectrum of
Catholic Attitudes
Ed. Robert Campbell, O.P.
Bruce. \$4.95

Not in centuries has there been such a diversity of viewpoints on vital issues freely voiced in the Catholic Church. Father Campbell, who previously edited "Spectrum of Protestant Beliefs," here presents this rich variety of opinion among Catholics. He has selected twenty-nine topics on which he solicited prevailing opinions. About half refer to specific articles of the Creed, ranging from God, Christ, Original Sin, Mary, the Eucharist, Church authority and the attainment of salvation. Remaining chapters discuss: conscience, Catholic schools, race, anti-semitism, liturgical change, peace, and similar issues.

Seven well-known writers participate with freedom and candor. They include: William Buckley of the "National Review", Daniel Callahan of "Commonweal", Dale Francis from "Twin Circle", Walter Matt, long associated with the "Wanderer", Marshall McLuhan famous for his theory "the Medium is the Message", and F. J. Sheed, author of dozens of books and founder of Sheed and Ward Publishing Company. These writers express views held by their numerous co-religionists whether of the left or right wing.

One type of Catholic who retains a preference for preconciliar ideas and practices is apt to view contemporary Catholicism as "declining, divided and dispirited." Another type of Catholic sees current religious turmoil as the inevitable death of outmoded traditions clearing the way for a Church that will be more alive and effective today. The opinions of both schools are fully and eloquently reported in this fascinating book.

Paperbacks for
Reflective Reading
Paulist Press *Deus Books*. 95c

"*Lord, Show us Your Face,*" by Andre Polaert presents "Reflections for Every Day in Lent." An introduction discusses the reason for keeping Lent; the "acceptable time"

in the Christian life; and the relation of Lent to conversion and the fruitful approach to the Sacrament of Penance. The Second half of the book contains a daily reflection of two pages each which are penetrating, suggestive and balanced.

"*Praying With the Bible*" by Jean De Fraine, S.J., centers reflection on "The Biblical Bases of Great Christian Prayers." Some forty to sixty pages are devoted to each of three classic approaches to God: The Lord's Prayer; The Magnificat, and The Beatitudes. The orientation here is biblical, and examines verse by verse the content, inspiration and consolation of these enduring words of Scripture.

"*Jesus: A Dialogue With the Savior*" is from an anonymous Monk of the Eastern Church. In some forty short meditations, the author succeeds in recalling vividly some of the vibrant words and scenes of the Gospel. These he brings alive again with a simplicity, beauty and directness which spurs the reader anew to "Come follow me."

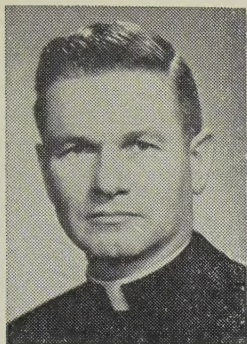
J.T.M.

GUIDE

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Guide Lights

FORMS OF ADULT EDUCATION (I) . . .

A basic principle of Adult Education is that learning is more important than teaching. Translated into religious renewal programs this should mean that the learners do most of the work. However, most of us church educators still think instinctively in terms of teaching, with stress on outlines, lesson plans, etc. This is probably inevitable because this is the way in which most of us were trained. Perhaps it even has considerable value because many of the adults with whom we deal today were also formed in this way and are almost as reluctant to learn as we are reluctant to dethrone teaching. In any case, we must always start from where we are, so if we think we are teachers and if the people in front of us also think we are teachers, then it may be just as well to accept the inevitable and go ahead and teach. Granted such a situation, we now come to the by no means self evident question: What is it that we must teach?

IDENTIFYING OBJECTIVES . . .

Even in a straight teaching situation it is never a matter of simply communicating a new batch of religious information — a kind of backing up of the truck from Vatican II and unloading the new theology. This picture is not as far-fetched as it may sound for a great many explanations of Vatican II that I have heard and read do just about that. It is as if theology, new or old, is self-explanatory. It isn't, and to assume that it can be is to misread the real significance

of what has happened in the Church. John Courtney Murray once said that the fundamental change in the Church in Vatican II was the passage from a classicist to an historical mentality. By classicist he meant the systemitizing of reality into abstract, timeless, and universal categories. By historical he meant the perception of reality as conditioned, evolutionary, situational, and relativist. The former is best seen in the Greek philosophers whose style of thinking has dominated Catholic theology for a thousand years. The latter derives from the 19th Century consciousness of history and the empirical sciences and is the predominant emphasis in modern thought. Murray saw Vatican II as the historic watershed between these two ways of looking at reality. The task of the religious teacher today to some extent always involves assisting the learner in negotiating this change in his angle of vision.

LEARNING AS CHANGE . . .

Today it is usually safe to assume at the outset that most Catholic adults will be helped as much by an introduction to the contrasting sides of the watershed as by a knowledge of the material upon which their different mentalities bear. However, there is a subtle difficulty here and it is this: The modern Catholic has a foot on both sides of the watershed without realizing the awkwardness of such a stance. As a 20th Century human being he has not been unaffected by the historical mode of thinking and in fact most of his understanding of world events, economics, and society is dominated by it. On the other hand, his religious formation comes from an entirely different mold. When he mentally deals with religious matters there is a grinding of gears as he

shifts into the classicist stance and considers God's revelation and its ethical implications in ahistorical and almost absolutist terms. In fact, in such a situation religious principles tend to become absolutes out of necessity since they really do not fit into the customary framework of a person's thinking and must for that reason be made self sustaining. Absolutizing them takes care of this. However, it then becomes even more difficult for a person to learn because now one of his real anchor points is threatened with change. Such an unhappy dualism is a challenge to the religious educator. What is necessary if genuine change is to occur is to relate the new content to his existing experience of perception in the historical mode.

TEACHING INTO HISTORY . . .

The simplest way in which the teacher can attempt this is by bouncing theology off one or more of the social sciences. This means presenting the new theological content in minimum quantities but not by itself. The new theology comes as much out of the historical, psychological, and sociological conditions of contemporary thought as it does out of the Church's tradition and it should be taught that way. Thus, theology is only part of the lesson content. The balance, and even the bulk of the presentation should delineate the cultural context from which it takes shape. Naturally, some understanding of the historical background of both the old and new theology, of the psychological reasons behind the learner's difficulties with change, and of the sociological role and functions of the Church and religion in contemporary society is a prerequisite. This is not as difficult as it sounds. Some familiarity with the fundamentals of religious sociology, individual and group psychology, and modern Church history will provide the necessary tools. The difficult part is using these to reflect upon present events in the Church and the world and relating these to current theologizing. But there is no easy way around this; the teacher must prepare himself. Fortunately, there is a good deal of high quality literature to assist him.

SOME ADVANTAGES . . .

In following such an approach much can be accomplished. First, teaching Vatican II in this way incorporates the historical mode of thought into the teaching process itself. The insights of the council come wrapped in the conditions that gave rise to them. In this way, in good McLuhanese, the medium becomes the message. Secondly, such teaching establishes connections for the learner between patches of his experience which were hitherto unconnected. Common sense and experience have taught him valuable historical, psychological, and sociological truths. Very often he has been unable to relate these to his experience of religion. By teaching religion out of this same background all kinds of unsuspected connections within his own experience should begin to emerge and these will strengthen his overview of reality. Finally, such a way of teaching reveals how the Church's belief and practice is shaped and influenced by culture and other historical forces. This is very important for the believer today and can be reassuring confronted as he is everywhere by change.

In sum, if we are going to teach we must in some way teach along these lines, for people must be able to integrate their religious and secular frames of reference if they are ever going to feel at home both in the Church and the world.

END AS BEGINNING . . .

If the change elicited by such teaching launches the learner into the historical mode of thought, it is only a beginning. What he gains is less a mastery of the subject than a new way of studying. If the lesson has been successful he resumes his always precarious and uncertain journey but equipped now with a tentative, critical, probing and flexible religious vision. What this spells ultimately for the Church is impossible to discern but in today's crisis of transition these are probably the only habits of mind that will enable the inquiring Christian to keep abreast of his changing identity.

JOSEPH V. GALLAGHER, C.S.P.